

# **JUST BUILT WRONG**

A Proposal for a Thesis in Creative Writing

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## **פשוט נבנה שגוי**

הצעת מחקר לתיזה בכתיבה יוצרת

המחלקה לאנגלית

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## INTRODUCTION

"Just Built Wrong" will be a novella following two siblings, Henry and Ann, and their friends Rose and Josh as they discover their shared history and the ramifications of their choices. The narrative arc of the novella will follow the "heroine's journey," as defined by Victoria Schmidt, which all four characters will complete together. The heroine's journey as a narrative structure takes its protagonists through disillusionment and death in order to experience a rebirth. For this reason the novella will be written primarily in the style of magical realism, drawing heavily from mythical and biblical influences. The novella will deal with the discovery of the characters' shared history and the choices the characters will make upon their discovery.

## AIMS AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION

This thesis will be a novella in three acts, focusing primarily on Henry and Ann. The novella will thread the character's histories to contribute to the overarching theme of the collection, culminating in a final act in which the characters will be forced to create history together. The choices they make, and their families make, will bring them together and cause them ultimately to face the same destiny. In this way the history of the characters made by their separate choices informs their shared destiny. The death and ultimate rebirth inherent in a heroine's journey and emerging from the active choices will feed into the theme of the collection: history becoming destiny. To engage this theme of history and destiny the characters will deal with conflicts of identity, family loyalty, and inherited guilt.

The characters will create their own destiny by the active choices they make and thereby redeem themselves. The novella will be written primarily in the style of magical realism which comes from the inherent magical tinge of the heroine's journey of rebirth and redemption through active choices. The four characters face their mythical and biblical histories and ultimately choose to allow that history to enchant their lives.

## CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The theme of "Just Built Wrong" is of history creating destiny and the choices that follow. This theme comes to explore a well established literary convention. A story that establishes a protagonist as a "chosen one," in all of its variations, claims that this character is set apart in order to fight and succeed against a great foe. The story will use fate or destiny to establish credentials for this character, to single out the protagonist, regardless of his initial intentions or opinions. In "Just Built Wrong," I would like to explore the relationship between the status of a "chosen one" and the ultimate choices that the character has to make following such an appointment. Although a "chosen one" may be established as the only character right for the journey, that character still has to make those choices and deal with the consequences that follow. "Chosen one" suggests destiny and fate, but it also bears the weight of choice. It conjures up history and destiny, but also leaves room for failure and unfulfillment.

An example of a "chosen one" journey which is informed by history and destiny is J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. In *The Lord of the Rings* Frodo Baggins is a humble character who is apparently capable of withstanding the great temptation of a ring of power and therefore "chosen" to save the world. Frodo's uncle bestows the ring on him, himself showing great strength to leave the ring behind, and Frodo is compelled by wiser men to take the ring to safety elsewhere. After completing the task of bringing the ring to a safer place, Frodo is exempt from the responsibility of the ring. However, when a council of the wisest people of his age balk at the weight of bringing the ring to its ultimate demise, Frodo volunteers to take the ring through great dangers to the only place

it can be destroyed. All of this falls in line with the typical hero: a humble man is called upon to embark on a journey where he rises to the occasion and does what greater men would not do.

However, what makes *The Lord of the Rings* particularly interesting is that in the end Frodo does not withstand the temptation of the ring and chooses not to save the world. A much weaker character Gollum flings himself at Frodo in order to take the ring from him. Gollum is thrown into the fire with the ring where they are both destroyed. In an essay on *The Lord of the Rings*, Diana Wynne Jones explains that in Tolkien's stories the characters are impelled to become heroes because of history. The long history that precedes each character is well established and then pushes that character to move forward. The status of a "chosen one" is not arbitrarily applied and does not mean that the character will succeed, only that he *can* succeed.

Throughout *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien repeatedly emphasizes that the world is coming into a new age and the decisions made by the characters will shape the immediate future of the world. Moreover, Tolkien emphasizes that these characters have been situated to change the course of future history by the choices made by their ancestors. The past is thick throughout the narrative. It is what drives the characters to act. Frodo is in place to try to save the world because of family history. Frodo came to have the ring because his uncle Bilbo had made a decision earlier, in *The Hobbit*, the prequel to *The Lord of the Rings*, to keep the ring of power when he found it. The decision made by Bilbo shaped history so that Frodo would be set to face the ring of power. Another important character is driven to make decisions based on history as well. Aragorn son of Arathorn is plagued with guilt because his ancestor was in place to

destroy the ring of power but failed to resist its temptation. Because of this failure Aragorn refuses to be king where he is needed for fear that the temptation of power in his family history infects him as well. This guilt also inspires Aragorn to accompany Frodo on his quest to destroy the ring of power. He makes this decision to atone for the sins of his forefathers.

The past, not as events but as decisions made, place people in situations in which they must make their own decisions about how their future will be shaped. These characters make their own decisions in the hope that they can save future generations from the mistakes of the past.

I am not writing epic quest journeys. I am not even writing High Fantasy like *Lord of the Rings*, although it was a great inspiration to me. What is important to me is the destiny. What I want to do in this thesis is to weave the stand alone stories together so that they show a history which leads four characters to make decisions about their future. It is important that the history of these characters is what compels them to make decisions about their future. The choices they make will shape their future, just as the choices made before them pushed and pulled them to face their present.

It has been said that in *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne was attempting to define a newly born culture, one with little history and therefore nothing to its name. However, the first step taken in the prologue is to set the novel as the tale of centuries of choices and their consequences. The legends of the house "prolong themselves . . . into our own broad daylight, and bringing along with it some of its legendary mist." The history of the house stalks the present characters of the novel so that no man is set down outside a context. Hawthorne continues in the prologue that the reader might mistake

the book for the experiences of the ordinary man. Yet the book is an excellent example of magical realism. The history which precedes the novel creates its magical hue in hinting at a future destiny born of the history of choices and mistakes. Likewise, in "Just Built Wrong," the connection between the histories preceding these characters and their choices necessitates magical realism.

The thesis will follow the heroine's journey as outlined by Victoria Schmidt in 45

*Master Characters:*

The feminine journey is a journey in which the hero gathers the courage to face death and endure the transformation toward being reborn as a complete being in charge of her own life.

Her journey starts by questioning authority, then gaining the courage to stand up for herself, and finally embodying the willingness to go it alone and face her own symbolic death.

The theme of the thesis comes directly from the heroine's journey: of making choices to be charge of their own life. The issue of history leading to destiny leaves the characters to grapple with their inherited history, those choices that lead to the present, and the characters own decisions in the present. While the characters confront their past they will in turn be required to make active decisions that shape the future for others.

They will therefore deal with conflicts of identity, family loyalty, and inherited guilt, influenced by the mythical and biblical. These influences will allow the thesis to explore identity and obligation while impressing the magnitude of choice between history



and destiny. I have a desire to “write a book in which modern life and heroic mythical event approach[] one another so closely that they [are] impossible to separate” (Jones, 2012). The style will reflect this desire. I will borrow from the story-telling mode of myths and fairy-tales: it will be unaffected, unadorned, and concise.

## SHAPE OF PROJECT

This thesis will consist of three acts, each act in three parts, approximately 30-40 pages each. The first act will establish the connection the two main characters and the two ancillary characters have. It will move on to a partial discovery of their shared, more significant family history and the beginning of their departure to discover more of their shared history.

The second act will show the journey the characters take. Here they will face their fears and give up the illusion of control. This act will end with a death, either real or metaphorical, which will break the newly confident heroes.

The third act will begin the rebirth of the characters, from which they will find that those defenses they employed before were not their greatest tools. This will conclude the novella, placing the remaining characters in a happier place than where they began. This is all in accordance with the narrative arc of the heroine's journey.

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